

million? I think most of us would like to build stadiums today for \$31 million.

Mr. Speaker, this is just a simple tribute to all those hardworking souls that made the Astros games so much fun and made the Astrodome the Eighth Wonder of the World where so many people enjoyed the opportunity to be there, not only for baseball but so many other activities and conventions and meetings. We are just grateful for the facility, and I guess what you would say is, it is off into the sunset.

But do not worry, the Astrodome will be there for others to enjoy for many years to go as we move downtown to the new Astros stadium called Enron Field located in my district, the 18th Congressional District. Hats off to the Astros, congratulations, and I will see you in the World Series.

TRIBUTE TO FIRST RESPONDERS, THE NATION'S FIREFIGHTERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. SMITH) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, back in 1992, Congress passed legislation to allow and establish a national memorial for fallen firefighters. Yesterday up in Emmitsburg, Maryland, we had such a ceremony. This past year, 95 firefighters in the United States lost their lives in the line of duty. I think this Congress, this Nation, owes these individuals, the Americans that have fallen in the line of duty before them and certainly every first responder in this country, a debt of gratitude, a vote of thanks. Protecting public safety and public property is a brave calling. We certainly should as a Congress thank those individuals for the great job they did. Yesterday up in Emmitsburg it was a day of remembrance but it was also a day of celebration, because these individuals contributed so much in the spirit of honor and duty. I am a strong believer that everyone should be a supporter of their community, should try in some way to make their individual communities a little bit better by contributing, by being in public service, by being on the fund-raising committee, contributing an effort to help others when they need help.

It seems to me that cynicism has just spread too far across this country and there are too many that now consider duty and honor to be just words, relics of the past. But these men and women, our first responders, our police, and firemen especially in yesterday's dedication, they believed in duty, they believed in commitment, they believed in community. And certainly these qualities in first responders across the Nation deserve more support from this Congress.

Now, we call them first responders because, and I will give a couple of ex-

amples. When we turned on our television last spring to the terrifying situation at Columbine High School, who did we see on that television set? It was the first responders that got there first. The firefighters were there first. Whether it is wildfires or earthquakes or tornadoes or fires of unimaginable danger and stress, or when it is a beloved kitten going up a tree or when you need help for a fund-raising in the community, it is these firefighters that are there, they are willing to make the difference, they are willing to give their time and the effort.

We have got 32,000 fire departments in the United States. We have got 103 million first responders. Eighty percent of those first responders are volunteers, volunteers that go and risk their lives to protect lives and safety and support their community. I think they embody the beliefs of the founders of our country who were deeply committed to the idea that the individual had an obligation to the community, that our country needed its domestic defenders, our firefighters, our first responders, every bit as much as it needed a national defense.

Our thanks certainly should go out not only to these firefighters but their loved ones who experienced the tremendous effort, the sacrifice that these firefighters have made for their communities. Stories where firefighters made the difference are in almost every home and every community. They are certainly in my home where the firefighters came to my farm and saved not only property but the lives of a lot of my cattle on that farm. As far as I am concerned, they are the champions we can never fully thank, and speeches like this speech tonight or speeches up in Emmitsburg never are going to be adequate enough to thank those individuals that made that kind of sacrifice.

If there is any lesson that we can take, Mr. Speaker, as Americans from those in our communities that contribute so much, to make sure that we also make an effort to their memory to try to do our duty in helping others, in helping our community, in trying to do something to make our communities better and help the lives of the people that we know a little better, that is what we should do.

NORTH CAROLINA RECOVERS FROM HURRICANE FLOYD

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mrs. CLAYTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. CLAYTON. Among all the death, destruction and despair that has been visited upon the people of North Carolina as a result of Hurricane Floyd, there are many bright spots. This evening, I would like to acknowledge some of those who have given of

themselves and their resources to this vital cause.

There are many deserving people who have helped North Carolina in the aftermath of Hurricane Floyd. I want to thank President Clinton for adding \$20.3 million in low-income energy assistance funds to his original extended relief package of \$528 million. Thank you, Mr. President. I wish to thank my colleagues, Representatives from the neighboring States, who have banded together to support the victims of this disaster. A special thank you to the director of FEMA, Mr. Witt; and to our governor, Mr. James Hunt, of North Carolina and their staffs for working around the clock to rescue and relieve North Carolina residents.

Some 52,000 citizens have called FEMA now seeking assistance, and Governor Hunt has had to deal with many more. Thank you, Mr. Witt and Governor Hunt, for your dedication to those in need.

I wish to take a minute to thank the Red Cross and the Salvation Army for their special help. The Red Cross opened many shelters. The Salvation Army provided mobile kitchens. And we appreciate the efforts of FEMA to provide meals ready to eat, ice, blankets, water and emergency generators. We also appreciate the hundreds of individuals in local communities, neighbors and citizens who have helped and are helping out continuously. And we appreciate the outpouring of support and resources from across the Nation. Truckloads from Baltimore, busloads from Washington, D.C.; students from North Carolina colleges, churches from far and wide, citizens of every hue, every stripe, every background, all Americans, helping out.

I know of heroic rescue efforts of people, farm animals and pets conducted by neighbors, local fire departments as the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. SMITH) just mentioned, state police officers and their staffs. I wish to commend them all for their dedicated service.

A ray of sunshine was seen in North Carolina today. Today, October 4, 1999, schools reopened for thousands of North Carolina students. This is a big step forward in the long, painful attempt to return to normalcy after Hurricane Floyd. Tarboro High School in devastated Tarboro opened school today and about 60 percent of the students looked forward to attending school. I am grateful to all who have made the small routine tasks like attending school become a reality after so many days of fear and flooding. I am very grateful for those North Carolina children of our great Nation who strived hard to reestablish their daily routines and attend school today, perhaps under continuing family hardships.

I am very thankful for the county school teachers, principals, and maintenance workers that made reopening

schools in North Carolina one of their top priorities. I am appreciative of the State emergency workers who worked with Federal agencies, FEMA, and my district office staff in Greenville and Norlina, many of them affected by the hurricane themselves but who put the welfare of others first. These public servants have worked long and hard hours to help clean up the communities and find food and shelter for the needy, and worked long hours to keep North Carolina afloat when it looked as though it was sinking.

I am especially thankful for the deep-spirited North Carolina people who have shared with me in letters and phone calls and private visits their willingness to share with their neighbors. Some folks have said they look forward to rebuilding their communities with hard work and the cooperation of others. Even a disaster of this magnitude will not hold North Carolina back.

Again, I sincerely thank all for so much outpouring of goods, donated food, clothes, contributions and, most of all, the volunteerism of time through the local community churches, their congregations in North Carolina and every other State in the United States. All have been terrific. I have never been so proud of my State's people or to be an American as now during this time of crisis.

Most of all, I want to thank all who have helped, for giving us hope to rebuild North Carolina, places like Princeville, Tarboro, Kinston, Goldsboro, Pinetops and Greenville back into the great places they were. Thank you all.

Yet much more help is needed and support. That is why, Mr. Speaker, I intend to join with Members of Congress from other impacted States to try to send a legislative package for further relief to the President for signing. As a part of that package, we need to update the laws so that small farmers and small businesspersons can be treated on an equal footing with other families. We will also need more resources, and that will also be a part of the legislative package.

Tomorrow, we will consider a resolution offering our colleagues an opportunity to go on record as willing to help and provide the necessary resources to make a difference. The people of North Carolina are resilient, and we will bounce back from the situation. But we will need the help of all Americans.

The winds will go, the rain will go, the rivers will crest, the cleanup will begin, and the restoration and rebuilding will take place. The spirit of North Carolina will return. Mr. Speaker, with your help and the help of our Colleagues.

□ 2045

THE IMPORTANCE OF INCREASING FUNDING FOR HIV-AIDS RESEARCH, TREATMENT AND PREVENTION IN MINORITY COMMUNITIES

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PEASE). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Mrs. CHRISTENSEN) is recognized for 30 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Speaker, I have often said on previous occasions when I have come to the floor that one of the greatest challenges facing this Nation is closing the gap in health care between our white population and our communities of color. It is this that the Congressional Black Caucus and the Health Brain Trust would address through its HIV state of emergency because, you see, HIV-AIDS, although it is very important to the welfare of our communities, is only the tip of the iceberg.

The underlying problem is really the two-tiered health care delivery system that does not address the barriers to health but exists for African Americans, Hispanics, Asian/Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and Native Hawaiians and Alaskans. Although the White House and the Department have been listening and have begun to respond to the call of the caucus to action, Mr. Speaker, we still have a long way to go, primarily because this body, the Congress, has not become fully engaged in the process.

That is why we are here this evening, my colleagues and I, to raise the level of awareness to the disparities in health care, to provide information on the breadth of the gaps and to enlist our colleagues' assistance and support for our efforts to have health care and community development dollars be applied to this very grave problem which threatens the promise of this Nation in the next century.

Mr. Speaker, I am joined here by several of my colleagues, and I would like to begin by yielding to the gentlewoman from the 17th Congressional District of Florida (Mrs. MEEK).

Mrs. MEEK of Florida. I thank my colleague, and I am pleased to join with the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands. She has nobly shown in her endeavor as chairlady of the Congressional Black Caucus' Health Task Force that she has the unique ability to mobilize and to organize and push us forward into the new millennium. It is a time for such leadership, as the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands has shown us, and I am thankful for her leadership. She is calling us here today to push very strongly for the full funding of the Congressional Black Caucus' emergency public health initiative on HIV-AIDS for the fiscal year 2000.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot talk enough about this initiative; it is so needed. If we do not take care of the health care needs of the minorities, the health care needs of the majority will certainly be under strain, as it already is. The \$349 million the Congressional Black Caucus has requested is targeted proportionately to African Americans, Hispanics, Latinos, Asian/Pacific Islanders and Native American communities based on epidemiological data released by the Center of Disease Control. So the CBC is trying its very best to target the funds where the real need is.

Mr. Speaker, these dollars will build upon the success of the 156 million requested for HIV-AIDS prevention in minority communities in fiscal year 1999. We thank the Congress for that allocation, but it is not enough. Although welcome, it is not nearly enough to combat the devastating effects of the AIDS epidemic in our community. African Americans and other minorities continue to suffer dramatically higher rates of disease and death, long-term rates of illnesses from treatable diseases than other segments of the general population; again, I quote, putting the money where the real need is so that it will overcome the disparities in our health system.

Our Nation spends over \$7 billion for HIV treatment and prevention and control; but listen to this, Mr. Speaker: but only \$156 million is specifically targeted to minority communities. I repeat that. We spend over \$7 billion in this country for HIV treatment and prevention and control, but only \$156 million is specifically targeted to minority communities which now account for more than 48 percent of those infected by the disease. That is a mere 2 percent of impact. Surely steps must be taken and effective measures must be put into place to ensure that resources follow the trend of the disease across all segments of the U.S. population.

That is why my colleague, the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands, called this special order. Man's inhumanity to man is based on the color of one's skin is untrue. Man's inhumanity to man is not based on the color of one's skin, and any kind of treatment in this country cannot ignore the fact that we are all in this situation together. A minimum of \$349 million should be appropriated in fiscal year 2000 to address this health emergency in communities of color. This is a health emergency.

I want to thank the rest of my colleagues here, but I want to end by saying, we cannot continue to suffer these dramatic increases and this higher rate of mortality from death and disease and long-term rates of illnesses from diseases that are treatable. These diseases are treatable, and we cannot continue this disfunction different from other segments of the population. As